What happens when Daddy's Child Support Payments Stop?

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Statement of the Research Problem

It is projected that at least 50 percent of children will spend a significant portion of their childhood with only one parent – typically their mother (Horn & Sylvester, 2002). This is due to the increase in the divorce rate and the increasing number of children in never-married mother families. The number of children born to unmarried women has increased dramatically over the last five decades. Fifty years ago, approximately 6 percent of births were to unmarried mothers but births to unmarried women accounted for 40 percent of all births (Child Trends, 2009). Most of these children grow up in single mother households where 25 percent live below the federal poverty level and almost two-thirds have incomes below $30,000 per year. Together, these trends have produced what some researchers term "fragile families" – unmarried parents and their children "who are at greater risk of breaking up and living in poverty than more traditional families" (Carlson & McLanahan, 2004a, p.241).

Research Background

Overall, the research indicates that children who grow up in a single family household do not fare as well on important measures of social and developmental well-being, compared to two-parent families, even after controlling for income and education (Ginther & Pollak, 2003; Manning & Brown, 2006; Manning, 2002; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). According to McLanahan & Sandefur (1994), adolescents from single parent households, regardless of race, education and marital status, were twice as likely drop out of school, twice as likely to have a child before the age of twenty, one and a half times more likely to not be working or going to school in their late teens and early twenties. Other researchers have found children from single family homes have decreased educational attainment compared to children from two-parent homes (Ginther & Pollak, 2003; Nelson, Clark, & Acs, 2001).

Similarly, research has documented the positive effects of father involvement (Allen & Daley, 2007; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Father involvement has been positively associated with children's personal-social competencies and physical development (Lamb, 2004, Lamb & Tamis-LeMonda, 2004).

Research Questions

This study identifies factors associated with higher and lower levels of Father Involvement and explores the following questions:

1. What variables are significantly related to father involvement among low-income non-custodial fathers?
2. Among factors that are significantly related to fathering involvement among low-income, non-custodial fathers who do not pay child support, how much of the variance in father involvement can be explained by father factors, family of origin factors, child factors, co-parental relationship, new partner factors?

Methodology

This study uses secondary data from the Turning It Around (TIA) project to explore how individual and contextual factors predict father involvement among low-income non-custodial fathers in Central Kentucky. Survey and interview data were collected on 264 non-custodial fathers who participated in a psycho-educational program that had a dual focus on substance abuse and parenting. All participants were recruited while serving time for nonpayment of child support. Fathers who did not live with their youngest child were selected for analyses examining their frequency and nature of involvement (N=264). The sample as a whole is relatively young (M = 30.07, SD = 6.53). Overall, fathers do not have high incomes. The mean monthly income is $571.00 ($SD$=$590.53). Fathers have an average of 11 (SD=2.62) years education. Most fathers (68.5%) self-identify as African American (N=174), with Whites making up 29.9% of the sample (N=79). All participants who consented to participate in the research study were administered the KY Fatherhood Experiences Inventory (KFEI) and the Center on Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) GPRA (Government Performance and Results Act) Client Outcome Measure—Modified Version (Walker, Logan, Morgan, & Nigoff, 1999).

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17.01) was used to conduct all analyses of the data which include univariate descriptive analyses, bivariate analyses, and multivariate analyses. Factor Analysis and Hierarchical multiple regression were used to build and test a model to predict Father Involvement.

Results

A factor analysis (Maximum Likelihood) was conducted to determine if items on the instrument were aligned with the construct of father involvement and to compute a father involvement score. Six criteria were used to determine the number of factors to retain: factor loadings, communalities, eigenvalues, Kaiser Criteron, residuals and scree plot. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity confirmed that Factor Analysis was appropriate. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO= .940, and is above the recommended value of .6. The Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that the correlations between items were sufficiently large for the Factor Analysis (χ^2 (185) = 1910.82, df 136, $p < .000$). Overall, the factor analyses produced one distinct factor underlying father involvement in the Kentucky Fatherhood Inventory items and factor had a. Cronbach's alpha of .95. All items had primary loadings over .6 explaining 62.56% of the variance in Father Involvement.

Contrary to popular opinion, fathers who do not pay child support are not necessarily uninvolved with their children. Although this study showed that just over 30% of fathers had no contact with their youngest child in the last year, almost 70% of fathers had contact and were involved on some level. Fathers' scores ranged from 0 and 64 on the Father Involvement Scale and were fairly well distributed. Almost 25% (*N*= 46) of fathers had a score between 0 and 15. Forty four fathers (23.7%) scored between 16—30. Another 39% of fathers (*N*=72) scored between 31 and 50. Lastly, 23 fathers (8.9%) scored between 51 and 64 on the Father Involvement Scale (See Figure 1). In addition, fathers engaged in a variety of father involvement activities (See Table 1).

Hierarchical Multiple Regression results indicate that the overall model significantly predicts Father Involvement, R^2=30.9, R^2_{adj} =26.3=, F(1,128)=5.17, p <.000. In particular, father's contact with other children, child gender, and parental agreement on visitation predict Father Involvement.

Utility for Social Work Practice

At a practical level, this research can lead social workers to recognize the barriers to Father Involvement and ensure that programming addresses father's needs such as help in securing skills, resources, and mental health or psychological treatment so they can be in a better position to make these financial contributions.

The relationships among all the variables significantly related to father involvement provides additional information to guide practice and policy affecting non-custodial fathers' involvement with their children. Taken together, these predictors of Father Involvement can be used to help social workers and others who work with non-

custodial fathers to plan interventions and policies that address this population of fathers. For example, these data can help to drive discussion related to outreach programs for fathers. Many social workers have the perception that fathers who do not pay child support are uninvolved; however, results from this research suggest that this is not always the case, and social workers can begin by recognizing the activities fathers share with their children. Social workers are in a position to help change the negative perceptions of non-custodial fathers who do not pay child support. These data can help social workers working with fathers to think about how their client population may be similar or dissimilar from those in the sample, and to begin to better understand what predictors of father involvement may be the most important and useful in practice.

This study may help guide discussion and dialogue with other social work practitioners and those involved in fathering initiatives in how best to facilitate contact between the father and the child. This study suggests one of the most frequent activities that fathers engage in is 'talking' with their child and fatherhood outreach programs could provide computer access or cell phones for fathers who are unable to physically spend time with their children so that at a minimum, email or 'chatting' contact is maintained.

This study indicates that fathers are more likely to be involved with their sons than daughters and social workers can think about interventions to raise father's comfort level with relating to female children. In addition, social workers, recognizing the powerful impact child custody and visitation agreements have on prospective father involvement, can advocate for fathers to judges and the court system for ensuring that this process is handled fairly and smoothly. Cultivating a strong co-parental relationship and agreement on custody and visitation could preserve this fragile relationship before the father disengages and social workers can advocate for mediation through this process.

Research shows that few programs address previous key familial relationships that may have influenced the father and his relationship with his children (Martinson & Nightengale, 2008). Social workers who work with alternate sentencing programs can identify areas for improvement such as exploring father's previous relationships that may have shaped father's understanding and meaning of father involvement.

Fathers parent differently than mothers and contribute uniquely to children's development. It is important for social work practitioners to dispel the myth of the 'deadbeat dad' and to embrace a more holistic notion of father involvement if we are to be effective in involving fathers, particularly low-income, non-custodial fathers in our outreach efforts.

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Figure 1 Father Involvement Distribution

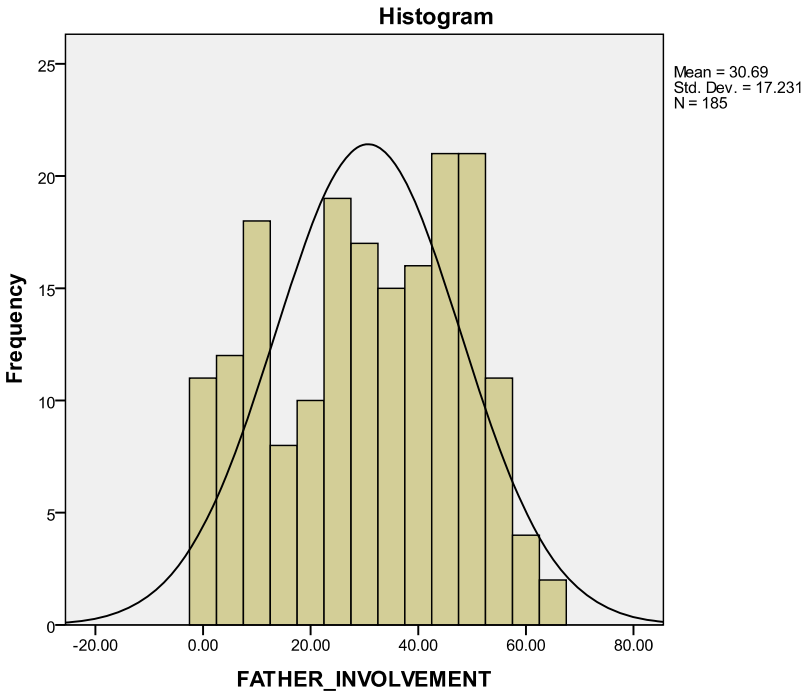

Table 1 Father Involvement Activities

Variable	N	Mean	Median	SD	Range
Take care	185	2.31	2.001	1.59	0-5
Help bedtime	185	1.85	2.00	1.71	0-5
Read a book	185	1.66	2.00	1.58	0-5
Ready for school	176	0.68	0	1.30	0-5
Corrected/disciplined	185	2.37	2.00	1.76	0-5
Cook	185	2.32	2.00	1.62	0-5
Homework	*142*	*1.47*	*0*	*1.80*	*0-5*
Emergency	170	0.37	0	.736	0-3
Doctor/dentist	185	0.37	0	.702	0-3
Task	185	2.02	2.00	1.58	0-5
Ballgames	185	2.47	2.00	1.54	0-5
Talk	185	3.25	4.00	1.45	0-5
Movie/event	185	1.32	1.00	1.366	0-5
Protect	185	2.87	4.00	1.94	0-5
Eat out	185	2.18	2.00	1.53	0-5
Attend games	137	0.85	0	1.33	0-5
Hunting/fishing	185	0.27	0	0.75	0-5
Wrestle	185	2.41	2.00	1.62	0-5
Play video	185	1.85	2.00	1.75	0-5
Shopping	185	1.77	2.00	1.37	0-5
Fun	103	2.80	3.00	1.45	0-5